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SUBJECT: U/S OTERO ENGAGES GOI MINISTER TIRATH ON WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT AND TIP

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Otero met with Minister of Women and Child Development Krishna Tirath on November 6 to discuss Government of India (GOI) measures for women's empowerment and to combat trafficking in persons, two enormous challenges India faces. They also discussed areas for bilateral cooperation on both issues. Otero stressed that bilateral cooperation on trafficking in persons would help U.S. understanding of the scope of the problem and India's efforts while supporting effective strategies to address it. END SUMMARY.

GOI WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

12. (SBU) During their November 6 meeting in New Delhi, Under Secretary Otero and Women and Child Development Minister Krishna Tirath agreed that a country could not reach its full development potential without empowering women economically and socially. Tirath presented Otero with documents detailing GOI efforts to achieve this important goal. Tirath highlighted amendments to the Constitution (Articles 14, 15, 15.3, 16, 19 and 42), the increase in reservation of women in village councils (panchayats) from 33 percent to 50 percent, the 2005 Domestic Violence Act, the 1994 Prohibition of Sex Selection Act, the Working Women's Hostel program, and the recent Daughters Against Dowry Awareness Campaign as effective GOI measures. In addition, Otero and Tirath discussed the importance of self-help groups to empower women. They also briefly touched on Tirath's upcoming meeting with U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, Melanne Verveer to discuss the Women's Empowerment Dialogue (WED), reported septel. (Note: The WED encourages exchanges on women's empowerment issues with the goal of mutual collaboration and cooperation. End Note.)

GOI MEASURES TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

13. (SBU) Otero and Tirath also addressed trafficking in persons (TIP). Tirath emphasized the GOI's strides in combating the problem and pointed to the Ujjawala program, launched in April 2007, which acts to prevent trafficking and supports the rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. As of March 2009, 79 projects have been instituted under the program with each project assisting on average 50 women. In addition, Tirath said the increased level of awareness of the problem indicated that human trafficking is being addressed. She added that the GOI has focused on the economic and social empowerment of women as important factors in preventing TIP. Otero stressed that the U.S. wanted to cooperate with India to help

prevent trafficking as well as obtain better information on the GOI's varied anti-TIP efforts. This would help Indian efforts to solve the problem and would assist in ensuring the accuracy of the TIP Report. Tirath indicated she would investigate potential areas of cooperation and would respond formally in a letter to Otero.

COMMENT

14. (SBU) Tirath, who has been minister since June, was not comfortable with the details of her portfolio and relied on Economic Advisor (and regular embassy contact) Manjula Krishnan for a complete description of the GOI's various women's empowerment and anti-TIP activities. Nevertheless, Otero's exchange with Tirath on TIP helped underscore the importance the U.S. attaches to anti-TIP efforts, and signaled our willingness to help the GOI address the challenge.

ROEMER